Book Review

Book Title: **The Terrance Lindall Retrospective**

Author: Terrance Lindall

Reviewed by: Phillip Somozo

The Terrance Lindall Retrospective is a difficult book to appreciate if you are not a visionary artist, a philosopher, or a fiend.

As its title suggests, it is a quasi-autobiographical account of a man known as the contemporary world's foremost illustrator of the greatest English epic poem, Paradise Lost by John Milton. Harmless as it sounds, it subverts modern-day Humanism. This is a book for people that are nobody's fool.

I did not want to write a review of the book. But reading one page led me to another, and another, until I finished all 253 pages. The reason for the progression is the author's versatility because truly versatile people are rare and intriguing to my intellect.

By the turn of the new millennium, scientific studies pushed back the parameters of versatility as they agree that man not only has two intelligences—IQ and EQ—but a dozen. Some say it is two dozen. In effect, should a person be able to develop these potentialities altogether, s/he could become superhuman, even godlike (consider Lucifer)!

Terrance Lindall, already 74 years of age as of this writing (2018), has demonstrated in his life the multiplicity of intelligences a human possesses. A perusal of the Lindall Retro's contents will show how diverse he has been in his life's conduct—a soldier, mortuary personnel, financial manager, art and antiques collector and dealer, comic book illustrator, writer, high-fashion model, curator, museum founder, biggest surreal events organizer... and who knows what else. I do not think he was dishonest and self-serving in writing the retrospective.

All the above-mentioned life episodes, inconspicuously or openly, were mere tributaries to the one passion that burned his being: illustrating Paradise Lost. Thus, my review method was to connect points I believe to be significant to Paradise Lost, to come up with a story veiled by Lindall's economy of narrative text but hinted at by clues and implications. Since I live on the other side of the globe, what is available to me, through internet, is only the e-copy of The Lindall Retrospective. For accuracy of references, I can only hope its paging is the same as that of the hard copy.

An intelligent person is not innocent like Adam and Eve in the Garden. Firstly, he knows what he wants in life, then, acts shrewdly to attain it. Shrewdness becomes

necessary due to challenges that are normal metaphysical fixtures of society, as it is with gravity over nature.

Speaking of intelligence, ninety-nine percent of the Earth's seven billion human population, individually and collectively, at some point or another, cease to attain progressive intellectual enlightenment but convert into puppets of the Establishment. They do what they are told to do without question and thinking. Worse, they serve as nuts and rivets of exploitative societal structures and institutions. Knowledge may be the fruit of Eden's Forbidden Tree but *cognitive dissonance* (coined by Earon Davis) is its indigestive symptom.

Not Lindall, to a greater degree than many successful people. If MRI can examine the nooks and corners of his psyche, behind the enjoyment he savors while performing diverse tasks in his career, is his mind's Eye, bulging, enraptured, staring at Paradise Lost (PL)—a one-pointedness signifying Terrance Lindall is John Milton's chosen one to illuminate PL with lucidity appropriate for the postmodern period. For this, Humanism's versatile subversive had no way of escaping the devil, to their mutual benefit and pleasure.

From Afton Wilderness to Minneapolis

Like the first man Adam, Lindall explored and frolicked, in the wild paradisiacal swamp during his childhood in Afton, Minnesota, always searching for strange adventure. Like summer, boyhood came and went. As he grew up and attended high school and college in Minneapolis, separation from this wilderness "devastated" him.

In college, he experienced strange, albeit pleasurable, sensations with unseen presence of a "powerful being" seducing him with "great power" if he yields. These sensations ended with pain and "blackouts". Because he resisted the sensations, it vanished. He never mentioned the blackouts again in his retrospection.

Instead, he was enamored next by a beautiful young lady artist (p. 64). Driving her around town in a hearse, literally, was not enough to gratify Lindall's attraction for the woman. I guess the woman is too smart to allow herself to be touched when all her friends were watching wherever the hearse goes.

Never the less, the lady artist turns out to be Lindall's Eve. In no time, he followed her to the city that never sleeps: New York. There, Fate ushered Lindall to a sanctum in his psyche where the Madonna of Monsters—one of his lesser known paintings—was waiting manifestation through his canvas and paint palette.

New York, Lindall, and Fame

The Madonna of Monsters is crowded by the ghastly perversions that Humanism's progeny had become. Gently stroking the Serpent of Guile and Lies (symbolizing Religion) her other hand lovingly presses the shoulder of Hunger whose face

expresses satisfaction as he reaches up for her hip. The picture is theatrically arranged and could well be a monsters family portrait. Other family members present are Knowledge, Ignorance, Fear, Capitalism, Science, and Medicine, among others—all ghastly and dreadful. They were overlooked by God symbolized by the Sun above, while the devil's minions hover over (p. 184-197).

Lindall's caption states the Madonna is Hope—a false one as she is described as futile, suggesting it is because of the hope for better life conditions and/or eternal life that people get exploited by religion, government, and big business. Consistent to Lindall's claim of hope's futility, the United Nations, for its goals, shifts theme from economic progress to mere sustainability.

Lindall's lurid rendition of the Madonna of Monsters on canvas is a milestone that speaks much of his psychological evolution from Minnesota to New York. His own fall from childhood paradise has opened an empty space in his life that needed to be filled. No doubt he must have encountered John Milton and Paradise Lost, academically and more, in high school and college in Minnesota.

It is common belief since time immemorial that a dead man's ghost is awakened when the living talk about the departed. Is it a question how great personalities long gone supposedly attain immortality? There is more to understand about spirit as indestructible energy. I dare say it was Milton's ghost or spirit that in Minessota attempted to possess Lindall, giving him very subjective pleasurable sensations and promising him great power should he yield.

Lindall's resistance to the strange sensations resulted to the earlier-mentioned blackouts, probably forcing Milton's ghost to make other arrangements to achieve intention. Since then Lindall's path to success cleared. If it was not Milton, it must had been the devil, itself, tempting Lindall. Either or, even both.

In New York, he gained dexterity over his hands, the brush, and the color palette with which he manifested atypical visions on canvas. Although he did not elaborate on his formal art training, it is obvious his painting compositions are influenced by Hieronymus Bosch. But Lindall ventured further by twisting humor with horror, and vise-versa, or he blended them so well for his unique, now recognizable, marque of surrealism.

Horrifyingly humorous, comically bizarre, he became a sensation in NY's contemporary art scene and sought after by award-winning horror and futuristic writers (copies of Heavy Metal Magazine reached my hands even as I lived a young recluse in a tropical Southeast Asian countryside from the mid-70s to early 80s). The devastation caused by leaving the wilderness of his boyhood is now being replaced by another form of excitement.

In the retrospective, I am surprised, Lindall's artstyle was not described by critics as humorous. Descriptions such as visionary, fantasy, narrative, and surrealist in several versions were correct. But none of those who made the definitions saw the humor aspect (p. 6 and 123). For that they missed a very important interpretive element.

The ugly perverted images (described by the New York Art World Magazine as DNA gone berserk) populating his canvases certainly are ghastly. But seeing through the vomit-inducing and fear-inspiring scenarios, one can discern humor flowing through the artist's vein. That to me is highly significant to interpretation as I shall later elaborate.

The fame he gained allowed him to purchase luxury cars (Mercedes Benz) and real estates (p. 86), could be factor why he abhorred mortgage. If my speculation is true, one can tie it up with his socio-political-economic disillusionment (p. 110-136 and all over). Understandably, his academic education of Paradise Lost levelled up to involve self-reflection and dialog.

Paradise Lost Foremost Contemporary Illustrator

We get to know a person by learning about what he does, speaks, and thinks (paints or writes).

Lindall's magna cum laude from Hunter College, on Philosophy and English with minors on Psychology and Physical Anthropology, is testament he did not personally reject social conformity but to demean it from within. Shrewdly he made use of the social qualifications he had built, speaking his mind freely even if it offended others, mostly, people in position I referred to earlier as establishment puppets and nuts and rivets for oppressive societal structures (p. 51-52 A Few of Many Controversies).

That he had organized history's biggest-ever surreal events (Brave Destiny and Milton's 400th Birth Anniversary Celebration, p. 76 and 29) and the recognition he gained as the contemporary world's foremost illustrator of Paradise Lost (p. 5 and 30) are so far the veritable proofs the great power offered to him is now in his hands.

By writing the essay The Post-Art World (p. 114-116) he risks becoming everyone's enemy and, like the Hasidic professor, Kapitalisimo, getting shot to death (p. 118-119). Lindall admits he is not so much avante-garde. In art medium and technique true, but in thought he is avante garde. When he openly described himself as hermeneutic artist (p. 123), he neutralized the would-be assassin (if there were any). The self-contradictory, absolute, Western value of postmodern cultural relativism he verbally denigrated saved him without losing his elitist niche in contemporary art history in New York, and beyond.

More than an artist he is a philosopher. A visionary harbinger of the bad news that art and philosophy are dead, which historically is precursor to civilization collapse. His arguments, unacceptable to many, are sound and well-grounded.

Cognitive dissonance, says social critic Earon Davis, makes a person or group of people perpetuate a system if they profit from it, even if they violate the law or go against ethical standards. It is what is happening now to the world at large.

Lindall's ubiquitous employ of eye images in his compositions expresses his overriding and calculating propensity to observe objective reality. His philosophical

romance with lofty metanarrative Paradise Lost heightened his observation and deepened interpretation of society vis-à-vis PL. Quietly it is the only thing that matters to him.

All his other social commitments are subservient and subsequently dovetailed to Paradise Lost. Some of his employers sensed and expressed irritation over it. But how could they divert him from a lifelong passion? Unknowingly they dealt with an artist-philosopher giant that was born at this period of history to fulfil a mission.

The bottomline of the human problem is greed—for money, power, fame—a petty predicament to the sensible. Man was created in God's image but was contaminated by Lucifer's avariciousness. Because it has been man's operational mode for three thousand years it became a joke. The Blob (p. 132) is alive, self-replicating all over the globe, gobbling everything, victimizing everyone.

Lindall is one who takes this state-of-affairs seriously, but wisely takes a creative detour from exasperation to humor, lest one's emotional existence suffers the most and you miss the joy of planetary ride. He did an exceptionally right thing by treating a girlfriend to a hearse joyride. Making the best out of a bad bargain, so it is said. Some cracks opted doing a 9/11 or mass shooting.

Is his life mission to overthrow humanism? Not so. His love for the classics—art and literature—speaks of fine and high standard. There is a zen saying "We don't throw the baby away with the bathwater." Education, personal growth, societal development, subsist with historical context. There is wisdom from the past that if preserved can prevent Humanism's scorpion from stinging itself to death. This wisdom runs through the gamut of history and expresses itself through various mediums—persons that are interconnected by an evolving line of thought, forming as it were a growing and complexifying ecosystem.

Bienvenido Bones Bañez and the *Felix Culpa*

Modern history is a continuing fall of civilization that could crash with various parts disintegrating, disconnected, dysfunctional, and annihilated. It had happened before. It is happening again despite the advancement of societal operating systems. Warnings are drowning in political din.

So, quo vadis, homo s. sapiens? At the height of his hermeneutic examination of Paradise Lost and having aborted (post)modern humanism through art and philosophical arguments, this question lingered in Lindall's mind. Fascination with the devil peaked with a feeling of gratitude. Could this be the most dreadful product of Lindall's hell-illuminated mind?

Unintentionally, Lindall's gratefulness was precipitated by a clue from fellow hermeneutic surrealist artist Bienvenido Bones Bañez's statement that *"Satan gives color to the world."* In a public lecture Lindall admitted to have been inspired by Bones's pronouncement.

In the Garden of Eden, there is no internet, no social media, no cellphones. Everything is in perfect order and harmony. Human population was only two—one male, the other female. Every day, they smiled knowingly at each other and continue on with their blissful innocence. They ate only fruits. No Barbeque nor McDonald's.

They walked nude on foot and talked to the plants and animals. No intellectual conversations. You and I were not there because there was no chance. Before the Fall, our original father, Adam, and mother, Eve, did not know about sex. Can you spend eternity in such place as the Garden of Eden? If you can't even be vegan in this world, don't be hypocritical by answering Yes.

If you honestly answer NO, I don't want to spend eternity in the Garden of Eden for all the things I've been habituated to and would surely miss, then, you ought to be grateful to Satan too. There lies the connotation of Bones's pronouncement Satan gives color to the world! It was because of the devil's seduction that the first man and woman fell from God's perfect grace and landed in this world of opposites: love and hate, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, fame and shame, peace and war.

Adam and Eve's fall was the birth of Humanism, Lindall elaborates. They were now on their own to create meaning out of this world where one life is food to another.

Satan's Peculiar Graces

The karmic spell the devil cast over the world jolted man to the reality of having to survive inside a lion's den, so to speak (Prophet Daniel did, literally). Interestingly, man experienced inspiration at his successes over challenges and became adept at the arts and letters, creating beautiful figures and pictures and writing stories of his life exploits in relation to the universe around him. Man's fall placed him in a position to aspire something better. From a philosophical perspective, man is a beneficiary of the devil's peculiar graces, a *felix culpa* (fortunate fall) Lindall explains.

Certainly, Satan has an important role to play in the drama of God's creation, without which purpose would not be achieved as Christ would not have been crucified and resurrected without the betrayal by Judas. The irony with man is he gives in to and enjoys Satan's seductions but makes the devil the ugliest, most fearful, and vilest of all creatures. Lindall's portrayal as monsters out of Humanism's labors and of men as caught in horrible but humorous scenario is justified.

Further, Lindall declares that if Christians must celebrate Christmas, their expression of gratitude to the Saviour should include Satan. This one is hard to digest for mediocre minds that has been boxed in for millennia by a cultural practice that in the first place was inherited from pagans.

Satan, always, is projected by the church as someone to be feared and despised. Thus, programming humankind with binary thinking. The choice is either God or the devil, either/or. Through time, the binary choice transformed into my belief system

or yours? Humankind understandably fell for the devil, otherwise, society and the world would not be in such mess. Yet human subconsciousness, despite all the technological and systems development, stagnate in the Dark Ages.

The advantage of appreciating Lindall's gratitude for Satan's peculiar graces is that those who understand would be able to transcend the binary program thinking and level up one's understanding of God's all-pervasive order of love: *Ordo Amoris*. It is a huge step up should you develop compassion for Judas, being mandated with a difficult task to perform, and understand deeper the role of the devil. Love your enemy, a Christian dictum that feels like stone to be eaten (The Stone Eater p. 152). Once that is achieved, fear dissipates.

Lindall loves the classics but dismayed by what has become of humanism particularly in the postmodern period. While he recognizes the postmodernist reaction to flagrant art commodification as valid, he rejects the treatment of cultural relativism with absolute value. Contradiction in terms, that's what it is. Instead, he croons for the "elitists" in the arts—the very few who has *"the judgment to know what is worthwhile in human achievement,"* his own words.

Despite all his subversive pronouncements about humanism, Lindall still holds faith in the human, saying a new and greater Man (and woman) will emerge from Art's ashes. But before that, an event or two is yet to happen. All things considered, the end of Lindall's philosophical argumentation is the door he opened but had not fully entered. A sign hangs at the door it says *Ordo Amoris*.

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